

# ARROYO SECO PARKWAY SCENIC BYWAYS CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN



**The Arroyo Seco Parkway (circa 1940)**

## LOCATION

The Arroyo Seco Parkway runs between Los Angeles and Pasadena in Southern California for a distance of approximately 8.2 miles. This National Register-eligible road is a significant historic transportation resource, linking some of the most ethnically and historically diverse communities in the Los Angeles basin.



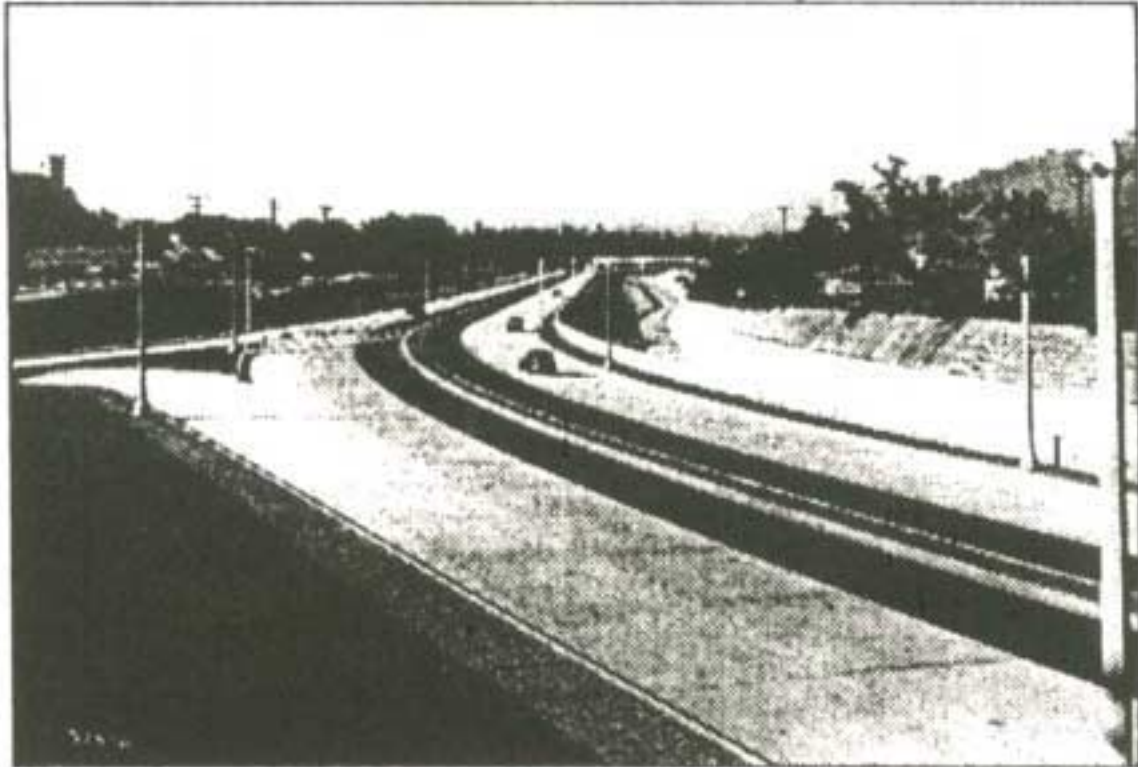
**1940's Rose Queen at Ribbon Cutting**

## PARKWAY HISTORY

Dedicated on December 30, 1940, the Arroyo Seco Parkway was the first freeway in the West. Limited access and the prohibition of cross-traffic provided driving safety and convenience, and marked the road as a thoroughly modern invention. Alternatively termed an “engineering marvel” and the “big ditch,” the facility became the prototype of the Los Angeles Freeway system.

Like other Los Angeles area freeways, the road was at its design capacity before it was even built. Consequently, the planned emergency shoulder was converted into a travel lane during construction. The new lane was surfaced with asphalt, providing the road's characteristic two-toned pavement. Intermittent “safety bays” were added in 1949 to compensate for the lack of shoulders.

Cramped ramp geometrics and limited acceleration and deceleration lanes can be attributed to the project's tight budget, the topography of the arroyo and the controversy over *eminent domain* at the time of construction. All three historic conditions resulted in a constricted right-of-way, leading to a road with unusually tight curves.



Parkway looking West

## PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The Arroyo Seco Parkway has become a legend for its raceway-like curves, cramped driving lanes, and perilous on and off ramps, but many have complained about the unsatisfactory conditions of the road. For commuters who sit in traffic jams on a daily basis, for maintenance workers who risk their lives to pick up trash and trim trees along the road, and for community members who feel that the parkway divides their neighborhoods, this road is neither cherished or valued.

To address these issues, the California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) investigated the engineering requirements needed to bring the road up to standards of the modern freeway. The reports concluded that it would not be feasible, either physically or economically, to expand the capacity or re-align the road. A new tactic was needed.



**American Society of Civil Engineers Awarded  
Parkway as Civil Engineering Landmark**

## HISTORIC PARKWAY STATUS

In 1993, Senator Richard Polanco, with the support of a task force of local organizations, agency representatives, and designers, took an alternate approach to improving the Parkway. They persuaded the state legislature to recognize the unique character of this 60 year-old stretch of road. The Arroyo Seco Parkway was designated a California Historic Parkway, a new category of road within the state's Scenic Highway system, that allowed for a reduced speed limit, and stimulated efforts to pursue preservation and rehabilitation of historic roadway and the adjacent communities.





**Historic American Engineering (Haer) Team  
Documenting Parkway For Inclusion In  
The Library Of Congress**

## FROM PARKWAY TO SCENIC BYWAY

The Environmental Planning Office of Caltrans District 7 is mounting an effort to designate the Arroyo Seco Parkway (also known as the Pasadena Freeway) as a National Scenic Byway, a program under the federal transportation bill ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act). The program is "A nationwide effort to identify, promote, and manage our country's varied and wonderful system of highways and roads through community efforts." Funding for enhancement projects becomes available when the road is designated a National Scenic Byway.

The Scenic Byways program is aimed at improving roads and the communities they serve. The overall project involves examining environmental, social, and aesthetic issues of the corridor, and recommending plans and designs that address both strengths and deficiencies. To further this agenda, District 7 received a FHWA Scenic Byways Corridor Management Planning Grant for FY 2001. Other District 7 efforts include documentation of the Parkway by the Historic American Engineering Record during the summer of 1999 and the recent completion of *A Landscape Framework Plan for the Arroyo Seco* by the Landscape Architecture Department at Cal Poly Pomona.



**Cal Poly Pomona Graduate Students**

## CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Scenic Byways designation is part of a larger planning effort involving the Arroyo Seco corridor. Planning efforts over the past 8 years have already resulted in coordination with several community groups. They include Northeast Trees, the Audubon Society, the Arroyo Seco Foundation, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Highland Park Heritage Trust, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Los Angeles County Bike Coalition, Los Angeles County Flood Control, the US Army Corps, the National Parks Service, Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department, Occidental College, Cal Poly Pomona, UCLA, and the transportation agencies LADOT and MTA.

Their enthusiastic support has framed the Scenic Byway project as a fully integrated component of a larger vision for the Arroyo Seco Watershed that includes regional air and water quality improvement, habitat restoration, cultural and recreational enhancement. Along the corridor, planning goals include economic development through heritage tourism, as well as innovative safety and aesthetic improvements to a heavily used urban parkway.

Transportation linkages are also envisioned to facilitate intermodal shifts between autos, busses, light rail, bicycles and pedestrians. These will increase transportation choices for corridor residents, reduce demand on the historic parkway, and stimulate much needed economic investments in a historically and aesthetically significant area.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Preparation of the Corridor Management Plan will begin this summer.

## HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE

Stay tuned to this website: [www.dot.ca.gov/dist07/aboutdist7/projects/arroyo\\_seco.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist07/aboutdist7/projects/arroyo_seco.htm). Draft plans will be published, as well as information on public workshops and hearings. We want to hear from you. Your input is important.

## **MILESTONES**

- 1983**      **Arroyo Seco Parkway determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.**
- 1993**      **Arroyo Seco Parkway designated a California Historic Parkway.**
- 3/1996**      **Arroyo Seco Parkway featured at the first National Historic Roads Conference, held in Los Angeles.**
- Highland Park designated the largest HPOZ in the city of Los Angeles.**
- 8/1999**      **Arroyo Seco Parkway designated a National Civil Engineering landmark.**
- 8/ 1999**      **Arroyo Seco Parkway documented by HAER.**
- 1/2000**      **LA County begins planning for a bikeway linking LA River, Arroyo Seco and Union Station.**
- Construction on Blue Line begins.**
- Audubon Society completes Master Plan for Debs Regional Park.**
- 6/2000**      **Landscape Framework Plan for the Arroyo Seco Parkway completed**
- Gray Davis earmarks \$86 million to create newest state park along the LA River and the Arroyo Seco.**
- Los Angeles River Center opens.**
- 8/2000**      **District 7 awarded \$308,000 FHWA TEA grant to replace existing signs on Arroyo Seco Parkway.**
- 12/2000**      **District 7 awarded \$368,000 by FHWA to prepare a Corridor Management Plan for the Arroyo Seco Parkway.**
- 3/ 2001**      **Arroyo Seco Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study (Summary Report: Phase 1) completed.**